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FTC's 'Tech Censorship' Investigation Is Censoring Comments About 'Censorship'

Content Moderation

from the *andrew-ferguson-speedruns-the-learning-curve* dept

Tue, Apr 29th 2025 12:08pm - **Mike Masnick**

The FTC's politically motivated inquiry into "tech censorship" has managed to prove exactly the opposite of what it intended: the government agency is now actively censoring public comments from people complaining about being censored by tech platforms.

It's almost too perfect. The FTC, under Chair Andrew Ferguson, **launched** what it called an investigation into "tech censorship" back in March. The investigation was based on the **repeatedly debunked** idea that social media platforms were unfairly silencing conservative voices. (This was already odd timing, given that Elon Musk had long ago turned ExTwitter into a non-stop Trump rally and Zuckerberg was **eagerly aligning Meta with Trump**, but consistency has never been the point here — **unconstitutional coercion** of anyone not sucking up to Trump is the point.)

But Ferguson seems committed to the bit, effectively making it clear that all platforms are expected to promote pro-Trump content… or else.

As the comment period continues through May 21st, Daphne Keller **spotted something remarkable**: **The FTC itself is actively censoring submissions about censorship**. And yes, this time "censoring" is the right word - it's the government doing it.

Take **Michael Dukett's submission**. This self-described "Concerned American Patriot" complained about TikTok "constantly removing comments and censoring my free speech," attaching screenshots of his removed comments as evidence. The irony? Many of those screenshots were themselves removed by the FTC for containing "profanity" or being "inappropriate."

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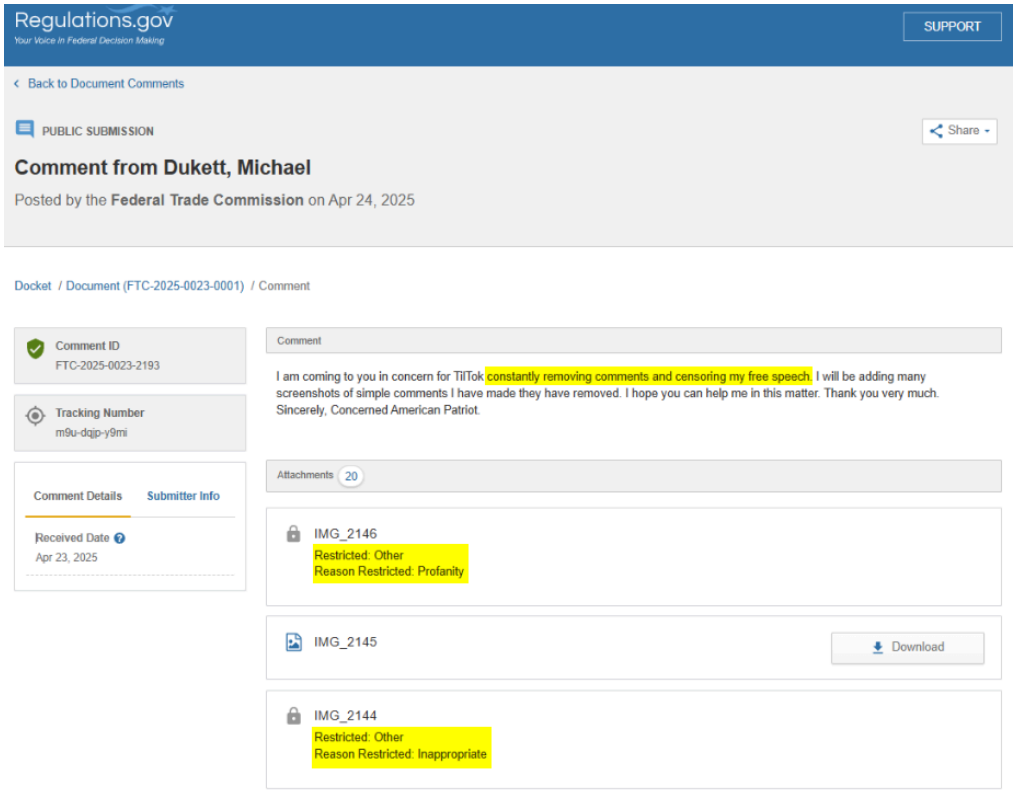
Regulations.gov
Your Voice in Federal Decision Making
SUPPORT
Back to Document Comments
PUBLIC SUBMISSION
Share
Comment from Dukett, Michael
Posted by the Federal Trade Commission on Apr 24, 2025
Docket / Document (FTC-2025-0023-0001) / Comment
Comment ID
FTC-2025-0023-2193
Tracking Number
m9u-dqjp-y9mi
Comment Details
Submitter Info
Received Date
Apr 23, 2025
Comment
I am coming to you in concern for TilTok constantly removing comments and censoring my free speech. I will be adding many screenshots of simple comments I have made they have removed. I hope you can help me in this matter. Thank you very much.
Sincerely, Concerned American Patriot.
Attachments 20
IMG_2146
Restricted: Other
Reason Restricted: Profanity
IMG_2145
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IMG_2144
Restricted: Other
Reason Restricted: Inappropriate

Of Dukett's twenty submitted screenshots, the FTC blocked nearly half — five for being "inappropriate" and four for "profanity." The very same kinds of moderation decisions he was complaining about TikTok making. Even more telling? The screenshots the FTC *did* allow through included threats about shooting home intruders and various personal attacks — content that clearly violated TikTok's community guidelines.

It's almost as if the FTC is learning in real time what **every platform eventually discovers**: open systems need moderation, including the ability to remove "**otherwise objectionable**" content.

And Dukett's case is far from unique. Scanning through the **over 2000 comments** in the docket reveals a pattern of the FTC practicing **exactly the kind of content moderation it's supposedly investigating**.

One commenter railed against "horrific censorship" after supposedly losing 34 Instagram and 33 TikTok accounts — only to have their FTC submission partially blocked for sharing personally identifiable information.

Even more striking is "**Jo Sullivan**," who requested an FTC investigation into platform moderators while calling for "the right to express ourselves within reason." The FTC's response? Blocking or redacting 16 of their 20 attachments for — you guessed it — inappropriate content and personal information.

Gosh.

The crazy thing here is that while private platforms have a First Amendment right to moderate as they see fit, the federal government does not. The FTC hiding these comments on its platform is, quite possibly, a First Amendment violation. The posts blocked for "profanity" are almost certainly protected speech under the First Amendment.

But the FTC's actions inadvertently prove what platforms have known all along: Any open system needs moderation rules and enforcement, or it quickly fills up with inappropriate content, profanity, and personal information. The FTC's own comment system demonstrates the **Masnick Impossibility Theorem** in action — content moderation at scale is impossible to do well, and someone will always complain about the decisions made. It doesn't mean that there is unfair bias. Sometimes it just means that some users are assholes.

The ultimate irony? Apparently the best way to determine if Andrew Ferguson thinks certain content moderation practices are acceptable is to submit specific decisions to his "tech censorship" investigation and see if the FTC itself censors them.

At this rate, Ferguson might just need to investigate himself for all this anti-conservative bias censorship.

Filed Under: andrew ferguson, anti-conservative bias, big tech censorship, content moderation, ftc

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Cathy Gellis: Exactly. There's no principled distinction.

John Roddy: It just feels like the courts keep front loading their analysis by focusing on all the procedural aspects as if that undermines the significant substantive elements somehow.

Which sounds like striking down any kind of fishing regulations because the overwhelming majority of any body of water containing fish is just water.

candescence: I suppose if there's one good thing about the way the USA does elections (and that's saying something because in many ways it does elections poorly) it's that the states being each in charge of election stuff even in federal elections makes it harder to tip the scales in some ways

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That One Guy (profile) April 29, 2025 at 12:19 pm

INSIDER

Nothing like shooting your own foot with ship-sized artillery

Talk about a glorious own-goal, open comments up to aggrieved members of the public to whine about how they're being 'censored' only for those same people to make clear that they were *moderated* for very good reasons, meanwhile the FTC *chooses* to engage in unconstitutional *actual* censorship themselves in response which just bolsters the case that the platforms were in the right.

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Anonymous Coward April 29, 2025 at 12:29 pm

You just don't understand. All those silly "constitutional" rules no longer apply. Any of them! Protest enough, and you will get a free trip to El Salvador.

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Derrick Knight (profile) April 29, 2025 at 12:50 pm

Crowdsourced propaganda

The obvious outcome will be a short press conference where a few examples of non-swearing conservatives who claim cancelation will be quoted and numbers including the potty-mouthed assholes will be used to inflate the claims. No questions will be taken (unless planted) and this study will get mentioned alongside all of the other bullshit used to feed the snowflake, cancel-culture, war on Christmas, meal team sixers.

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Anonymous Coward April 29, 2025 at 12:55 pm

> *At this rate, Ferguson might just need to investigate himself for all this anti-conservative bias censorship.*

Naw, remember, these things can do no wrong. So that means … the deep state is censoring the conservatives AND that they aren't actually conservatives anyhow, just liberals out to make trump look bad, or something.

Remember, when dealing with these jerks: If logical consistence would force them to do anything like introspect, they will instead do something stupid.

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31Bob (profile) April 29, 2025 at 1:02 pm

Right-Wing Idiots

They seem to believe that the 1st Amendment FORCES people to read their drivel.

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[2]

That One Guy (profile) April 29, 2025 at 2:11 pm

INSIDER

Re:

Oh the republican version of the first amendment is truly a sight to behold…

- You not only have a right to speak you have a right to speak on private property, even if the owner doesn't want you there.
- You have a right to an audience of your choice, and anyone attempting to refuse this whether by telling you that you're not allowed to say something or by not wanting to listen to you is violating your rights.
- Just as important as the right to speak is the right to speak without any consequences whatsoever, and any attempt to impose them is a violation of your rights.
- And last but most importantly, **none** of the above applies to anyone not a republican/conservative, because the first amendment **only** applies to republican/conservative speakers/speech.

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[3]

Stephen T. Stone (profile) April 29, 2025 at 2:12 pm

Re: Re:

Or to put it another way: They mistake "free speech" for "free reach" and forget that actions have consequences.

Collapse replies (2) | Reply | View in chronology

[4]

Anonymous Coward April 29, 2025 at 2:24 pm

Re: Re: Re:

> *They mistake "free speech" for "free reach"*

I think it would work better as: They mistake "free speech" for "forced reach"

But that's just my opinion

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[4]

Anonymous Coward April 29, 2025 at 5:02 pm

Re: Re: Re:

JD Vance and Donald Trump and more spread lies about the Haitian immigrant community in Springfield and that led to schools being evacuated over threats, people canceling events, and hate groups like the Proud Boys roving around stirring shit up. Where were the consequences for Vance & Trump spreading lies with the intent to steer their followers to terrorize the community there? Did anybody who made those threats that caused the schools to get evacuated face any consequences like getting arrested? Did any of the hate marchers get found out and face consequences like getting fired from their job, or even just ostracized by their friends & families?

We have, for a long while now, well before the harassment targeted at the Haitians in Springfield, been living in a world where the consequences are not hitting fast enough or hard enough or hitting at all, for a difference to be made.

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Anonymous Coward April 29, 2025 at 1:23 pm

How stupid can government clowns-I mean officials legally be?

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[2]

Drew Wilson (user link) April 30, 2025 at 12:28 am

Re:

That is still to be determined. Just when an answer seems to appear to show that we have finally reached that limit of maximum stupidity, the government will continue to find a way to exceed that threshold and find new levels of stupidity. This may very well be one of those mysteries that never get solved, despite the many levels of expertise trying to determine this.

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Anonymous Coward April 29, 2025 at 1:55 pm

My guess it that FTC is using AI to filter reports, than in few weeks, only read what is remaining.

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Anonymous Coward April 29, 2025 at 4:17 pm

You know it's bad when not even kombucha can be assed to show up to try to defend this stinking pile.

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[2]

Stephen T. Stone (profile) April 30, 2025 at 3:45 am

Re:

Seriously, it's weird that he's not showing up to spin shit like ICE arresting judges and children dying from an outbreak of a disease once considered eradicated in the U.S. Maybe his brain really did short out…

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Make this the First Word or Last Word. No thanks. (get credits or sign in to see balance)

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